

The Designation Procedure For Federal Agency Depository Libraries

A Handbook for Federal Agency
Officials who are Seeking Federal
Depository Library Designation



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I. Introduction

The Depository Library Program originated in the early 1800's when a joint resolution of Congress directed that additional copies of the House and Senate Journals and other documents be printed and distributed to institutions outside the Federal establishment.

From that small beginning, the Depository Library Program has grown into a system of close to 1400 Federal Depository Libraries. These libraries include many of the most prestigious libraries in the country. With few exceptions, all Congressional districts and territories of the United States have at least one Federal Depository Library.

II. Types of Designations

There are two basic ways in which libraries can be designated Federal Depositories. Most libraries receive depository status by being designated a Federal Depository by an elected or appointed Federal official. But a number of libraries receive status through special provisions of Title 44, United States Code.

A library chosen through these special provisions of the law has received a "by-law" designation. One of these provisions applies to agencies of the U.S. Government.

III. Designators

According to 44 U.S.C. 1907, "A depository library within each independent agency may be designated upon certification of need by the head of the independent agency to the Superintendent of Documents." The Superintendent of Documents therefore acts as the designator for Federal agency depository libraries.

IV. Permanence of Depository Status

Federal Depository Library status is an honor and is seen by most depositories as a unique and very valuable asset. Once status is awarded to a library, that library tends to hold the status indefinitely.

Libraries can lose their depository status only if they voluntarily relinquish it, or if the Superintendent of Documents removes it because they have failed to fulfill their legal obligations under Title 44 U.S.C.

V. Legal Obligations of Depositories

Federal agency libraries must meet all the requirements of the Depository Library Program. The most important of these requirements is accessibility of the depository collection to the public at large.

As stated in the Instructions to Depository Libraries, by accepting designation, a library agrees "to abide fully by the law and regulations governing officially designated Federal Depository Libraries." Further, "Free access to the resources of the documents collection by the general public is a fundamental obligation that all Federal Depository Libraries share (except for the highest State Appellate Court libraries)."

VI. Characteristics of Successful Depositories

Successful depositories share certain characteristics. The feature of paramount importance shared by successful depositories is dedication to public service. Libraries whose existing goals are similar to the public service goals of the Depository Library Program, and which have demonstrated a strong commitment to public service make excellent depositories.

Libraries that collect materials in a number of subject areas that are of interest to the general public usually provide superior public service. Libraries that are extremely specialized in collection development and clientele can find that it is difficult to coordinate a depository operation within a highly specialized library.

VII. Questions the Agency Administration May Want to Ask

Location

- Does the location of the library help or hinder public access?
- Can it be easily reached by automobile and mass transit?
- Is parking available?

Facilities

- Is the library large enough to successfully operate a Federal Depository?
- Is the library easily accessible to the physically handicapped?
- Does the library have the proper equipment needed to house and access Government documents?

Public Service Commitment

- Does the library administration fully appreciate the responsibilities and costs of Federal Depository status?
- Is the focus of the library wide enough to encompass the variety of needs and interests generated by the people of the surrounding area?
- Has the library demonstrated a commitment to public service in the past?

VIII. Procedures for Designating a Federal Depository Library

Most designations are initiated by the library or libraries requesting status. Federal agency library staff should present their request to the head of their agency, who will then present a formal certification of need to the Superintendent of Documents.

This letter of justification should address the library's eligibility for depository status, the library's unique qualifications for status, and the library's commitment to the goals of the Depository Library System (see example). The letter should be sent to the following address:

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20401

The Superintendent of Documents will evaluate the application. The evaluation will focus on such areas as commitment to serving the public; staff, space, and budget to be allocated to the depository collection; and the number, scope, and character of the items to be selected.

The evaluation will include an analysis of the need for an additional depository library and the ability of the library to provide custody and service.

If the Superintendent of Documents determines that the library is eligible for status, the library will be sent "Acceptance of Designation" forms. When these are completed, signed, and returned to the Government Printing Office, the library will be notified of its acceptance. The library is then immediately placed on the list of Federal Depository libraries. Any procedural questions should be directed to:

Chief, Depository Services Staff
U.S. Government Printing Office
Library Programs Service (SLL)
Washington, DC 20401
(202) 275-1119

IX. Sample Letter

A sample letter from the head of an agency certifying need for depository status follows. This is an example only, not a form letter. Each agency's certification should specify the circumstances and needs of that specific agency.

Letter from Head of Agency Applying for Designation and Certifying Need

(name)
Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20401

Dear _____:

I wish to apply for depository library status for the U.S. Department of _____, _____ Library, located at (address). No other library in the Department of _____ has depository library status.

The mission of the _____ Library is to serve the information needs of the American public in the field of _____ through both direct and indirect means.

The library meets these needs indirectly by providing current information, including Government information, to the Department's researchers and managers. The Department's

employees may then fulfill their obligation to collect, develop, and disseminate to the public all kinds of information related to the Department's programs.

The library meets the public's needs directly through direct service, whether in person, or through the mail or by phone. Approximately ____ information requests from various segments of the public are handled each year by the Library.

In order to continue meeting these needs, the Library needs to keep up with current acquisitions and add new materials not previously held. It is essential that this Library receive the legislative, judicial, and executive branch publications afforded to depository libraries. These materials will assist the library in carrying out two important functions:

- 1) providing agency employees with government publications needed to carry out program as well as administrative activities; and
- 2) fulfilling a responsibility for the development, collection, and dissemination of the full range of information relevant to the Department's overall program.

The only way that the Library will be able to fully support this program is through depository library status.

Department staff have carefully reviewed and considered all of the requirements and responsibilities outlined in Chapter 19, Title 44 U.S.C. that govern the establishment and operation of a government depository library. The Department agrees to conform to these provisions, specifically:

- ♦ making the library accessible to the public;
- ♦ maintaining a core collection of government documents;
- ♦ acquiring basic catalogs, abstracts, and indexes to use with the collection;
- ♦ classifying and cataloging these items;

- ♦ claiming materials not received;
- ♦ maintaining records regarding document location; and
- ♦ providing unneeded publications to other libraries.

As required by Section 1907 of Title 44, I certify to the Superintendent of Documents that the _____ Library needs depository library status and that this status will benefit both the U.S. Department of _____ and the public it serves.

Sincerely,

(Head of Agency)

